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Find in Entire Site Go

Backlinks...

Menu

Home
Search
List pages
Last Changes

Image Galleries

Main Sections

Aristasian Glossary
Aristasian Life and Culture
Aristasia Pura
Aristasia in Telluria
Philosophy and Religion
Sound and Kinematics
Telluria Criticism

Random Pages

Sai Vikhe
Telluria Criticism
Amity
Introduction to Aristasian Geography
Connubial Love
The Yeek
Deracination
Rajasic Culture and Technics
Sound and Kinematics

Search

in:
Entire Site Go

Login

Login as...
User:
Password:
Login

Standard | Secure

Art Neo

This term is often loosely translated as Art Deco, but it includes only those parts of Art Deco that are theatrical, feminine and sound. It also includes some elements of what is usually termed Art Nouveau. The bleak-and-barren blockish styles that are sometimes included in Art Deco are not Art Neo. The term is also applied much more broadly than Art Deco - for example, 1930s dance-band music is termed "Art-Neo music".

In Aristasian terms, Art Neo is considered as primarily the art of Novaria which has spread to other provinces: notably neighbouring Vintesse and Trent. Also, in Aristasia, Art Neo is not merely an aesthetic style but an applied aesthetic philosophy.

Art Neo in Telluria as defined in The Feminine Universe

The Feminine Universe discusses the significance of Art Neo at length as follows:

The invasion of everyday life by the machine in all its forms was one of the salient characteristics of the earlier twentieth century, and one seized upon as serving its purposes by the Cult of Ugliness which grew naturally out of the psychological deformism (which, as we have seen, must go hand in hand with deracination) of the pseudo-elite. William Morris had taught, in the later nineteenth century, that the machine is ugly. His answer was to retreat from machine culture into an arts-and- crafts movement little adapted to the conditions of the present phase of history. While Morris said in effect "The machine is ugly, therefore let us abolish the machine", movements such as Cubism in the early twentieth century gleefully inverted the argument, saying, in effect: "The machine is ugly; we cannot abolish the machine; therefore let us embrace ugliness." This argument had a certain persuasive force, although it was essentially only a rationalisation.- A rationalisation of the rapidly-growing love of ugliness and absurdity for their own sake, which is the cardinal feature of the deformist mentality and is so clearly central to the 'culture' of the post-Eclipse world.

What, however, may perhaps seem surprising is that the twentieth century also produced an aesthetic strongly opposing the Cult of Ugliness and the growing deformism of the demythologised world; and that it did this quite specifically in the arena of machine-production.

The movement now generally known as 'Art Deco' was precisely an answer from the Stream of Light to the aesthetic problem of the machine. Before proceeding further, we should like to define a little more closely precisely which movement we have in mind. Art Deco is a term applied retrospectively (a variety of terms, such as 'streamline moderne' were used at the time), and, though it is usually taken to mean precisely the movement we have in mind, it is both too broad and too loose for our purposes, sometimes including barren and blockish forms which belong precisely to the opposite movement, to the expression of formlessness and deformism.

We therefore use the term Art Neo, and let us define precisely what we mean by it. By Art Neo, we mean those aspects of Art Deco that are most generally associated with the name-the theatrical, upward-aspiring forms exemplified in the interior of the original Daily Express building in London and the Chrysler building in New York; a style that makes exhilarating use of geometrical line and curve, yet never divorced from the human spirit; that places solar imagery at the heart of much of its design, and contains a continual upward (Sattwic) and outward (Rajasic) thrust. It will be seen that the blockish designs sometimes included in the term 'Art Deco' are the very reverse of Art Neo, by their very mass and gravity exerting a Tamasic downward pull, and everywhere negating the human in favour of the alien, the cold and the lithoidal. This blockish style, which took over from Art Neo in the sphere of architecture after the Second World War (though it had been present throughout the inter-war period as the Stream-of-Darkness opponent to Art Neo - often under the name of the 'International Style') and reached its zenith in the hideous tower blocks of the 1960s, may be called the apogee of the movement of consolidation in the sphere of design - that movement not yet having passed beyond material consolidation into the stage of disintegration and chaos (this stage had, of course, already been reached in many areas of the 'arts' but it took longer for the disintegrationist movement to reach the areas of public design-this, as we shall see, is the main thrust of post -Eclipse design).

Having defined Art Neo, we may see how it permeated every sphere of public and industrial design, so that, as the Art Nouveau movement of the early years of the century was displaced by the products of the machine, instead of the immediate triumph of the blockish and the inhuman, foreseen triumphally by the early deformists and expected with pessimistic but equal certainty by the waning representatives of the old aestheticism, there intervened a

new movement from the Stream of Light, a new fruition of the positive tendencies of the Cycle, in the form of a style of design that embraced the machine without subordinating the human spirit to it; that made a new, uplifting, glorious, humanised world out of what could have been the Wasteland of the Machine Age.

More than this, Art Neo shows us and future generations that there is a way forward. If industrial design is ugly, inhuman, cheap and garish, we know for certain, as we could not have known if Art Neo had not had its brief but glorious flowering between the 1920s and the early 1960s (for there is very much vibrant a 1960s continuation of Art-Neo, even though 'International-Style' influences - no longer so called - were gaining ground in many areas) that it need not be so. That ugliness is not inherent in the machine. That if hideousness is foisted upon us, it is a conscious (or rather an unconscious) choice of the designers, not an unavoidable necessity. But the term Art Neo (unlike Art Deco) may be applied to a much wider range of things than those comprised in the world of design. The popular music of the 1920s and (especially) the 1930s is Art Neo music; its sharp syncopations and lilting melodies corresponding precisely to the angles and curves of visual Art Neo.

"C. S. Lewis, in an essay entitled 'High and Low Brows' , demonstrates the impossibility of distinguishing between 'high' and 'low' art near to the time of its production and points out that much of the art now regarded as of the finest quality was, in its own day, considered vulgar and insignificant. He suggests it is quite possible that a time will come when 'our age is known to posterity not as that of Auden and Eliot, but as that of Buchan and Wodehouse'. What is curious here is that having cited two poets as representatives of the art that is considered 'serious' in the twentieth century, he then cites two novelists as their possible counterparts. This is obviously because, on the face of it, there is no such thing as a popular poetry in the twentieth century (as there was in the nineteenth). In fact, however, there is a popular poetry in the pre-Eclipse twentieth century - but all of it is set to music. The lyrics of the Art-Neo music of the '20s and '30s - and its successors up to the time of the Eclipse - are the popular poetry of the twentieth century; and the great poets of the century may well be not Auden and Eliot, but Cole Porter, Lorenz Hart and Noel Coward. It is by no means unusual for great poems to be songs written to music, although the tradition died out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many of the great Elizabethan lyrics were written to music, as was much of the Greek anthology. The very word 'lyric' means a song sung to the accompaniment of a lyre. But unlike the great Greek and Elizabethan lyrics, we do not believe that the great twentieth century lyrics ever should be, or ever will be, severed from the wonderful music to which they are indissolubly married. Just as the novel, and the romantic movement in music, painting and poetry allowed the expression of areas of human sensibility untouched by earlier and higher arts, so

the popular song of the twentieth century, and the film, have explored new areas of the soul only appropriate, and only accessible, to this late age. And all these things belong to the great artistic movement which we term Art Neo.

The great art of the twentieth century is a democratic art in the best sense of that term: it belongs, we may say, to the lowest common denominator of humanity; but it does not seek to reduce humanity to its lowest and least noble elements (as does post-Eclipse culture). Its general aspiration is always upwards, always toward what is high and pure and good in the human spirit, and even where individual productions may take a cynical or an immoral turn, that is largely negated by the broad thrust of the movement of which they are a part. And what is most notable about the Art Neo movement whether in song or film or decoration, to a later and more degraded age, is always its unassailable innocence. An innocence that is not in any way false, but corresponds to the true nature of humanity and which, even when corruption is abroad among the elite, continues unassailed among the great and sound mass of the population. This was the case in the pre-Eclipse twentieth century, and only ceased to be the case when a massive assault upon the innocence of the people was launched through the mass-media, the educational system and every organ of public propaganda after the Eclipse. The innocence of the people is a bulwark against every kind of corruption. That is the true value of cultural democracy in a declining age, and it shines through every production of the machine-and-democratic art par excellence, Art Neo. Shines through until it is ruthlessly and systematically destroyed by the forces of post-Eclipse darkness.

Art Neo in Aristasia Pura

Art Neo in Telluria has been called a "blind aesthetic" because while it provides a counter to the aesthetics of deformism it, unlike them, has no underlying philosophy. It was a healthy aesthetic reaction against the Cult of Ugliness, but it was no more than an instinctive reflex.

In Aristasia, conversely, Art Neo is a deliberate and conscious attempt to adapt traditional aesthetic and spiritual values to the exigencies of a machine age. Art Neo, with its recurring solar motifs and uplifting quality, is a fully considered attempt to come to terms with the "problem of the machine" and bring a machine-dominated world into conformity with the eternal Principles of tradition.

This is possible because technics in Aristasia, rather than growing out of a revolutionary rationalist and anti-traditionalist movement (such as the 17th-century "Enlightenment" in Telluria) have always been seen as the legitimate, if in some respects distant, descendant of traditional Spirit-centred science.

As in Telluria, images and forms from traditional cultures play an important role in Art-Neo style. While in Telluria this is a mere "playing" with traditional forms, albeit frequently with an instinctive feeling for their remythologising depth, in Aristasia this is done with a conscious intention of maintaining and restoring links with tradition and keeping modern culture well-rooted in the sacred and nourishing Ancestral soil.

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